

WASHINGTON

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

For NCRS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

revised

6-73 (revised)

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic The Singer Building

and/or common 120 South State Street Building

2. Location

street & number 120 South State Street

A not for publication

city, town Chicago

vicinity of

congressional district

state Illinois

code 012

county Cook

code 012

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied (partial)	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name American National Bank U/T 52014

street & number 33 E. La Salle Street

city, town Chicago

vicinity of

state Illinois

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Cook County Building

street & number 116 N. Clark Street

city, town Chicago

state Illinois

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records

city, town

state

## 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Singer Building is a ten story structure with a full basement. The facade, facing State Street on the east, and about twenty-five feet on the south extending back along the alley, are clad with a glazed terra cotta. The tenth floor facade is set back a few feet and is polygonal in shape. The first floor store front has been covered or altered by later modifications.

The facade is vertically accented by the slim facade, strong piers at the corners, and two continuous slender piers that separate the three large double hung windows at each floor. The spandrels are recessed and richly ornamented with gothic details cast in terra cotta. The second, third and fourth floors are exceptionally tall, and the windows reflect this on the facade. All of this emphasis on the vertical culminates in a burst of gothic imagery at the parapets, where terra cotta finials extend well above the top of the building. Many of these larger elements have been removed and are being stored in the building.

The original typical floor plan includes an enclosed stairwell, two elevators, and a small restroom grouped midway along the north wall. The floor plan is open without columns or bearing walls. Each floor has a narrow hallway that runs east and west in front of the elevators, stairs and restrooms. The wall between the offices and the hallway is punctuated by windows (including operable sash), glazed doors, and transoms to borrow light from the windows on the south facade of the building. Each hallway, the restrooms, and the lobby on the first floor are decorated with a black and white checkerboard pattern of ceramic mosaic tile. The lobby on the ground floor is also trimmed with a barrel vault ceiling and ornamental cornice. Each elevator door is framed with ornamental bronze trim. The elevator doors are bronze and glass.

The ground floor is presently occupied by a restaurant in the principle space, while the former public lobby space accommodates a street level camel corn shop. Fortunately, the needs of each of these businesses did not require major alterations to the original structure, and the appearance today is essentially of a cosmetic nature. The original surfaces have been covered over by paneling, etc., but remains intact. Current plans call for high quality restoration to near-original condition of the public spaces.

# A. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance--Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates: 1925 Builder/Architect: Mundie & Jensen

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Singer Building is significant in three primary areas. It represents a structure built by a major American company whose product had an extraordinary impact on our nation and the world. The building was designed by an eminent firm of architects whose work before, during and after this building had an enormous impact on world architecture. Finally, the Singer Building clearly represents a type of structure which embodies certain characteristics of architecture and engineering which had profound influence on the design of buildings during a specific era, and which are no longer used.

The firm which eventually became the Singer Sewing Machine Company was established in 1850 by Isaac Merritt Singer. Singer was responsible for the development of the first practical sewing machine. The machine, the company, and Isaac Singer had a tumultuous, scandal-filled existence during the quarter century prior to Singer's death in 1877. Singer's hectic life caused numerous problems, which prevented the firm from establishing a truly efficient national organization until after his death. However, by the turn of the century, the Singer Sewing Machine Company was finally entrenched and had already established a major office in Chicago. By the First World War, planning had begun for constructing a new office building and display area in Chicago. Plans became firm in the early 1920's when the prominent architectural firm of Mundie & Jensen were commissioned to design and supervise construction of a modern office building including shops on State Street in Chicago. The building permit was issued on August 24, 1925; excavation was under way in early September of that year, and the building was completed in June of 1926. Records indicate that the Singer Company occupied only four floors of the building upon its completion, although additional floors were used by Singer as the years passed. Their occupancy included display space, their local agents' office, their "School of Dressmaking", and their collections office, as well as other corporate functions.

The Singer Building was designed by Architects Mundie & Jensen. William Bryce Mundie was a prominent Chicago designer who is often overlooked in favor of his more well known first partner, William LeBaron Jenney. Mundie was a Canadian, the son of an architect, and was trained to be an architect at Hamilton Collegiate Institute. At age 21, in 1884, he entered the office of W.L.B. Jenney. During the next seven years he distinguished himself and Jenney in draftsmanship and design. In 1891, at age 28, he was made a full partner, and the firm became Jenney & Mundie. In c. 1905, the firm became Jenney, Mundie & Jensen with the admittance of Elmer C. Jensen to partnership. Several years later, after the death of Jenney in 1907, the firm became Mundie & Jensen. It was under this name that the Singer Sewing Machine Company was designed.

Mundie was active in architectural circles during his youth and was an early member of the Chicago Architectural Club. His work was published widely during the late 19th Century. He was an extraordinary draftsman, and his primary contribution

(Continued on Continuation Sheet #1)

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National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
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Continuation sheet #1 SIGNIFICANCE

Item number 8

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to architecture was in the field of design. After Jenney's retirement and death in 1907, the firm had a decade of relatively modest success. However, during and following the First World War, they once more became a major firm responsible for large scale work of a quality similar to that of Jenney & Hundie. They did a number of bank buildings and several large, multi-story structures in Chicago and elsewhere, including the International Tailoring Building (1916), and the J.T. Taylor Building in 1922. The period between 1911 and 1917 saw several bank designs completed throughout Illinois. One of their largest structures was the Union League Club of Chicago, completed in 1924. It was built by the same contractor, R.F. Wilson & Company, who began construction of the Singer Building within a few weeks of its completion.

The Singer Building represented an important and significant event in the careers of Hundie and Jensen. The client's program called for a street level show room which would also permit retail sales. Provision for retail space in the basement and upper floors was also mandated, along with sufficient private and open office space on the upper floors to accommodate the Chicago office of the Singer Sewing Machine Company, as well as income-producing tenant space. All this had to be done on a lot with only 25' frontage on State Street and 115' deep. Natural light, column-free floors, and low maintenance were all basic requirements. The natural light requirement was the most difficult to resolve. It was solved by providing exceptionally high floor-to-ceiling heights on the lower floors which, in turn, permitted very large windows on the east facade. The south elevation, which fronted on an alley, was also equipped with a large double hung sash, thus providing substantial light even though it was not direct sunlight. The west facade was on an alley, but windows were provided on all the floors above street level. The elevators and stairs were on the north wall located generally towards the rear to avoid blocking the east light. The upper floors not only had the east, west, and south light, but also were fitted with north windows. As one ascends to the upper floors, the ceiling height is lower since the light is more direct and the need for high ceilings is lessened.

The column-free floors were easily provided since the width of the building was only 25'. The structure is framed in steel with flat tile arch floors. The exterior walls are brick with the east facade being sheathed in creamy white terra cotta ornament executed in gothic details. The terra cotta is returned several feet on both the south and north facades. A high percentage of glass is included in the well-proportioned main facade. The glazed terra cotta was intended to provide a low maintenance surface, but years of neglect have left it quite grimy.

When completed, the Singer Building represented the state of the art of big city, downtown, office/retail structures. The gothic details were generally considered entirely appropriate for such buildings and had been previously used on larger, more highly publicized buildings, such as the Woolworth in New York City and the Tribune Tower in Chicago. The Singer, however, was strictly a business structure designed for efficiency, low maintenance, and as a symbol of corporate stability. It succeeded admirably and served this purpose for half a century. During the past 25 years, the Singer Sewing Machine Company has been totally reorganized, and their former Chicago headquarters building has changed hands several times. During the decade of the 1970's it was apparently the target of a developer assemblage and all floors except the street

(CONTINUED ON CONTINUATION SHEET #2)

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Continuation sheet #2 SIGNIFICANCE

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level were vacated in preparation for possible demolition. The proposed project was not realized, and unfortunately the building has remained nearly empty.

The current owner of the Singer Building acquired it early in 1982. The first floor is still the only one presently occupied. Changes which have been made to the building over the years are largely cosmetic in nature, and a total rehabilitation including restoration of the facade and public spaces is completely feasible. (Decorative terra cotta elements from the upper levels have been removed for safety reasons, but they are stored in the building for use in future restoration.) Plans for the rehabilitation include working within the Guidelines of the Secretary of the Interior, and taking advantage of the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Brandon, Ruth. A Capitalist Romance, Singer and the Sewing Machine. Lippincott, 1977, New York.

Withey, H.F. & E.R. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased). Hennessey & Ingalls, 1970, Los Angeles.

(Continued on Continuation Sheet #3)

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 0.066

Quadrangle name Chicago Loop, IL

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UMT References

A 

Zone	Easting	Northing
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

C 

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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E 

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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G 

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

B 

Zone	Easting	Northing
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

D 

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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F 

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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H 

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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### Verbal boundary description and justification

East 130' of Lots 3 & 4 taken on a tract, excepting from said tract the North 16' feet thereof and excepting that part of said tract lying south of the north line of the east (Continued on Continuation Sheet #3)

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	county	code
state		code	county	code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Wilbert R. Hasbrouck, FAIA, Architect

organization HISTORIC RESOURCES date September 23, 1982

street & number 711 South Dearborn Street telephone (312) 922-7211

city or town Chicago state Illinois

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature \_\_\_\_\_

title \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
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date entered

Continuation sheet #4 HATOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL Item number 9

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Randall, Frank A. History of the Development of Building Construction in Chicago.  
University of Illinois Press, 1949, Urbana.  
Edwards, Richard, Ed. Edwards' Directory of Chicago. (Edwards), 1872 et. seq.,  
Chicago.  
Various Chicago Directories.

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA - Verbal Boundary Description & Justification Item #10 (Cont'd.)

\* west 18' public alley said north line being 9' north of and parallel with the  
south line of said lots 3 and 4 in block 141 in school section addition to Chicago  
in Section 15 township 35, range 10 east of 3rd Principle Meridian in Cook County,  
Illinois.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Brandon, Ruth. A Capitalist Romance, Singer and the Sewing Machine. Lippincott, 1977, New York.

Withey, H.F. & E.R. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased). Hennessey & Ingalls, 1970, Los Angeles.

(Continued on Continuation Sheet #3)

## 10. Geographical Data

Acresage of nominated property 0.066

Quadrangle name Chicago Loop, IL

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A 16 447890 4636420  
Zone Easting Northing

B 

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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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D 

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E 

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F 

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G 

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H 

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Verbal boundary description and justification

East 130' of Lots 3 & 4 taken on a tract, excepting from said tract the North 165 feet thereof and excepting that part of said tract lying south of the north line of the east  
(Continued on Continuation Sheet #3)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code   county   code  

state   code   county   code  

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Wilbert R. Hasbrouck, FAIA, Architect

organization HISTORIC RESOURCES

date September 23, 1982

street & number 711 South Dearborn Street

telephone (312) 922-7211

city or town Chicago

state Illinois

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *David Perry*

title *Director*

date 12/23/82

For HCRS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration





# United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

FEB 16 1983

IN REPLY REFER TO:

The Director of the National Park Service is pleased to inform you that the following properties have been entered in the National Register of Historic Places during the week beginning February 6, 1983 and ending February 12, 1983. For further information call (202) 272-3504.

STATE, County, Vicinity, Property, Address, (date listed)

- ARIZONA, Maricopa County, Phoenix, U.S. Post Office, 522 N. Central Ave. (02/10/83)  
ARIZONA, Pima County, Tucson, U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, 55 E. Broadway (02/10/83)
- CALIFORNIA, Humboldt County, Eureka, U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, Fifth and H Sts. (02/10/83)  
CALIFORNIA, Merced County, Merced, U.S. Post Office, 401 W. 18th St. (02/10/83)  
CALIFORNIA, San Diego County, San Ysidro, U.S. Inspection Station/U.S. Custom House, Virginia and Tijuana Sts. (02/10/83)  
CALIFORNIA, San Joaquin County, Stockton, U.S. Post Office, 401 N. San Joaquin St. (02/10/83)  
CALIFORNIA, Stanislaus County, Modesto, U.S. Post Office, Twelfth and I Sts. (02/10/83)
- ILLINOIS, Bureau County, Princeton, Skinner, Richard M., House, 627 E. Peru St. (02/10/83)  
ILLINOIS, Cass County, Beardstown, Park House, 200 W. Second St. (02/10/83)  
ILLINOIS, Cook County, Chicago, King, Patrick J., House, 3234 W. Washington Blvd. (02/10/83)  
ILLINOIS, Cook County, Chicago, Singer Building, 120 S. State St. (02/10/83)  
ILLINOIS, Lee County, Dixon, Nachusa House, 215 S. Galena Ave. (02/10/83)  
ILLINOIS, Logan County, Mt. Pulaski vicinity, Buckies, Robert, Barn (Round Barns in Illinois TR), SE of Mt. Pulaski (02/10/83)  
ILLINOIS, McLean County, Chenoa, Scott, Matthew T., House, 227 1st Ave. (02/10/83)  
ILLINOIS, Peoria County, Norwood Park vicinity, Christ Church of Lower Kickapoo, W of Norwood Park on Christ Church Rd. (02/10/83)  
ILLINOIS, Pike County, Summer Hill, Scott, Lyman, House, U.S. 54 (02/10/83)  
ILLINOIS, Sangamon County, Springfield, St. Nicholas Hotel, 400 E. Jefferson St. (02/10/83)
- INDIANA, Monroe County, Bloomington, Blair-Dunning House, 608 W. 3rd St. (02/10/83)
- KANSAS, Ford County, Dodge City, Sacred Heart Cathedral, 903 Central Ave. (02/10/83)  
KANSAS, Gray County, Cimarron, Cimarron Hotel, 203 N. Main St. (02/10/83)
- KENTUCKY, Christian County, Hopkinsville, Dalton, Monroe, House (Christian County MRA), 713 E. 7th St. (02/10/83)  
KENTUCKY, Jefferson County, Harrods Creek, Nitta Yuma Historic District, 5028, 5040, 5044, and 5051 Nitta Yuma (02/10/83)  
KENTUCKY, Taylor County, Campbellsville vicinity, Hiestand, Jacob, House, W of Campbellsville off KY 210 (02/10/83)  
KENTUCKY, Taylor County, Campbellsville, Campbellsville Historic Commercial District, Roughly bounded by Columbia Ave., Broadway, 1st, Hotchkiss Sts., Central Ave. (both sides), and RR tracks (02/10/83)
- MICHIGAN, Cheboygan County, Cheboygan, Newton-Allaire House, 337 Dresser St. (02/10/83)  
MICHIGAN, Wayne County, Detroit, Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church Complex, 1345 Grotiot Ave. (02/10/83)